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Collusion with loyalists was British security policy

(Susan McKay, [Irish News](#))

He'd said it was going to make "uncomfortable reading".

It certainly does and particularly for the secretary of state himself. In January 2003 Nuala O'Loan went to his predecessor and told him that her investigation into the way the police dealt with the murder of Raymond McCord jnr in 1997 was going to be serious and wide ranging. She needed more money to carry it out. "This request for funding was not met," Mrs O'Loan reported yesterday (Monday). Almost a year later, some money was provided but not enough. This significantly delayed her work.

Mark Haddock did not have the same trouble extracting money from the public purse. He admitted to detectives he had shot Catholic taxi driver Sharon McKenna in 1993 while she was looking after an elderly Protestant neighbour.

He was not charged and his role has not been investigated, even though he remains the chief suspect. Special Branch rewarded him with a 60 per cent pay rise. His handlers said they "could not afford to lose him". He was free to continue his career as a killer.

Mrs O'Loan's report is, as both Tony Blair and Bertie Ahern have said, "deeply disturbing".

It reveals that the police, including very senior officers, were involved in assisting loyalists to carry out the murders of innocent people. They failed to act on information that could have saved lives. They protected killers by destroying evidence. They conducted sham interviews designed to cloak rather than reveal the evidence. They also allowed loyalists to threaten to kill, to beat people up, to conduct 'punishment beatings', to carry out armed robberies, to deal drugs, to stash weapons and to extort money.

They destroyed evidence of their own wrongdoing. Whole murder files went missing.

Then they refused to cooperate with the police ombudsman's investigation. Most of the retired officers Mrs O'Loan contacted didn't even reply. Others gave evasive or farcical

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answers to her questions.

At least one lied outright. Serving officers in the PSNI also showed what an external evaluator called an 'obvious lack of enthusiasm' for cooperating with Mrs O'Loan. Unionist reactions to this shocking report have been predictable and depressing. The DUP's Jeffrey Donaldson spoke of "one or two" officers who maybe "didn't play within the rules".

David Burnside accused Mrs O'Loan of conducting a "campaign of vilification" against Special Branch.

Their comments are shameful in the face of the evidence contained in this report.

The formidable and brave Mrs O'Loan has done us a great service. She has produced, against the odds, a report which shines a spotlight onto the activities of one UVF unit in one estate in north Belfast during one period of the Troubles. There is every reason to believe that if a similar effort was made to illuminate the activities of other loyalist units across the north then other similarly sordid pictures would emerge.

There is already evidence of collusion at every stage of the Troubles. We know from official government papers that the Ulster Defence Regiment was full of UDA men.

We know from independent inquiries that the UDR and the RUC were heavily involved in loyalist murders in the south Armagh area. We know that most of the UDA gang that murdered Pat Finucane were security force agents of one sort or another.

Any reporter who has spoken with families bereaved by loyalist paramilitaries will know that suspicions of collusion are rife. Many, many people believe that there were sinister and unexplained elements to the murder of their loved one which point to security force involvement or that there was something badly wrong with the way the murder was investigated.

Of course there should be a public inquiry into collusion. But although 25 files were sent to the Public Prosecution Service by Sir John Stevens, no-one has been charged. The British government refused to cooperate with the Barron investigation into the Dublin/Monaghan bombs.

It has failed to produce documents required for inquests into contentious murders. Its reaction to Judge Cory's call for an inquiry into murders in which he found indications of collusion was to rush through a law that will make it impossible for the truth to be uncovered.

Loyalists always saw themselves as the 'gloves off' wing of the security forces. There is growing evidence that collusion was part of British security policy here. The enemy was the IRA and all means were acceptable in the effort to defeat it.

It did not matter if the law was broken or if innocent people were brutally murdered. Why are unionists so defensive about

Mrs O'Loan's work? Why did the NIO try to obstruct this investigation?

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